Freeing Yemen's Port City from the Iranian-Backed Houthi Militia

By Ido Aharoni
Friday, 29 June 2018 03:59 PM

Renewed drama in Yemen. This time, though, Iran's rivals are gaining ground.

Yemen has recently returned to high-priority media coverage and global awareness.

Right now, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi’s military, with its Arab allies, are advancing towards the strategic Red Sea coastal city of Hodeidah. The Iranian-backed Houthi Shi’ite militia, rulers of this port town for nearly four years, are at risk of being expelled.

Per credible international media reports, after taking the Hodeidah airport, the Saudi and UAE-led coalition has postponed an offensive into the city and seaport, urging the Houthi side a chance to withdraw and avoid an urban stand-off that would likely be accompanied by civilian suffering. The Arab coalition has given diplomacy a chance, waiting as a UN team tries to persuade the Houthis to transfer port control to an international administration. The world is watching with apprehension over what may unfold next.

This is not the only humanitarian crisis in the region.

The Iranian apparatus has shown no qualms about contributing to human disaster in Gaza, having funded and urged its Hamas client to arm itself at the expense of basic civilian infrastructure investment and economic development. Iran has shown no humanitarian remorse for the people of Syria, as it approved of its Assad regime ally gassing to death tens of thousands with chemical weapons and displaying millions more. Tehran continues to show no compassion for Lebanon’s political system and population in subduing them to its belligerent Hezbollah servant, even if the eventual outcome is a military confrontation with Israel.
Some Western media outlets have expressed concern that a battle for the town and its seaport would generate an even greater humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Many commercial shippers have reportedly scaled back operations as the Arab coalition and the Iranian proxy seem poised for battle.

The media’s concerns are understandable: Hodeidah has long handled the vast majority of Yemen’s imports — including basic goods such as food, fuel, and medical products — retaining this status even over the past few years, as Yemen has been engulfed in civil war. More so, observers fear that a prolonged battle for control of the city could result in nationwide food shortages and even famine.

Clearly, safe operation of the port is vital factor for Yemen’s well-being. The international community well understands that the port must remain in responsible hands. Unfortunately, the Houthi track record of port authority management is one of irresponsibility. Since the radical militia occupied the city in October 2014, Hodeidah’s main import has had a decidedly anti-humanitarian and destructive commodity: Iranian-supplied arms. The seaport has been the conduit for Tehran to supply the Houthis with advanced weaponry, including long-range ballistic missiles, mines, drones, and explosive-laden boats. This is Iran’s modus operandi wherever it acts directly or through proxy.

Besides advancing Iran’s hegemonic regional agenda in Yemen, the free flow of these tools of destruction have allowed its local proxies to threaten a diverse range of neutral parties; civilian oil tankers and cargo ships in the Red Sea en route to the Suez Canal, U.S. Navy vessels ensuring international freedom of navigation in the strategically vital Bab el-Mandab Straits, and passengers of various nationalities transiting at Riyadh International Airport.

The campaign to free Hodeidah is unfortunate but necessary precision surgery to remove a malignant tumor spreading throughout Yemen. The Arab allies seek corrective measures to heal Yemen, in the first place, to keep the Houthi-held seaport intact, rather than destroy it; to defuse, rather than preserve, the myriad undersea explosive devices placed by Iran’s local proxy, restoring maximal foreign access to the port; to boost, rather than reduce, the port’s facilities and handling capacity, permitting humanitarian aid and commercial imports to reach levels well beyond the nearly four years of Shi’ite militia control.

Saving Hodeidah is just one step in the broader regional campaign to thwart Iran’s nefarious and unhealthy designs. The radical regime in Tehran is all too happy to see the Western media frame the discussion of the potential urban combat around the discourse of a “looming humanitarian crisis,” while the mullahs less visibly sustain the existing crisis in the country, as well as in other Middle East hot spots.

Just like Hamas in Gaza, the regime of the Iranian mullahs wants images of Middle East death and destruction to dominate the headlines of international media. Tehran itself is actually the one paving the way for these atrocities. The only way to fix this malaise is pinpoint strikes at the
sources of Tehran’s adventurism — including military options when no other recourse exists.

These precision repair operations may lead to collateral damage as they unfold. But long term they will force an end to far larger casualties and chaos promoted by Iran and its proxies, curing the region from the damage Iran could inflict. It’d be a painful confrontation, but ultimately life-saving.

Ambassador Ido Aharoni serves as a global distinguished professor at New York University’s School of International Relations in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Ambassador Aharoni is a 25-year veteran of Israel’s Foreign service, a public diplomacy specialist, founder of the Brand Israel program and a well-known nation branding practitioner. He is the founder of Emerson Rigby Ltd., an Israel-based consultancy firm specializing in non-product branding and positioning. Ambassador Aharoni, who served as Israel’s longest serving consul-general in New York and the tristate area for six years, oversaw the operations of Israel’s largest diplomatic mission worldwide. Ambassador Aharoni joined Israel’s Foreign Service in the summer of 1991 and held two other overseas positions in Los Angeles (1994-1998) and in New York (2001-2005). He is a graduate of Tel Aviv University (Film, TV, Sociology and Social Anthropology) and Emerson College (Master’s in Mass Communications and Media Studies). At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem he attended the special Foreign Service program in Government and Diplomacy. To reach more of his reports — Click Here Now.

Source: https://www.newsmax.com/idoaharoni/yemen-hodeidah-iran-israel/2018/06/29/id/869247/